

Come Out and Play

Don't you know it is twice the fun when you understand the what and why when you are gardening? Become a Master Gardener! Next week, May 31 is the deadline for registering for the next Master Gardener class. The application can be downloaded <http://www.yorkcounty.gov/vce> or you can call Virginia Cooperative Extension, Hampton (757) 727-1401, York (757) 890-4940, Newport News (757) 591-4838, Gloucester (804) 693-2602.

I could entice you by listing the courses, such as pruning, lawns, basic botany among many others but let me say it's a fine opportunity for hands on learning. You will have expert instruction and a manual, a great, large publication by Va. Tech's horticulturists. The location of the classes is Northside Christian Church, 1213 George Washington Memorial Highway, York County. Classes start Sept. 4, continue from 9 to 12 Tuesdays and Thursdays mornings and finish Nov. 15. The fee of \$110 covers the manual and other materials.

May I add that the best thing about the course and the group you will join in your respective county is the people. They are giving and friendly, helpful and fun. You will be welcomed and you will enjoy becoming involved as a volunteer serving your community.

A Tale of Turtles

[This story was contributed by Sandy Pait, master gardener, former band teacher, expert on both roses and mushrooms!]

"Spring is the beginning of turtle time at my house. I live on 10 acres of woods and have found numerous turtles throughout the spring and summer months. I began noticing that all turtles are not created equal. I used to think that if you had seen one, you had seen them all, but not so.

Last spring I decided to label the turtles to see how many different turtles frequented my property. I set out each morning with my coffee mug in one hand and a small basket with bright red nail polish and chunks of sliced tomatoes. I marked each turtle I found with a letter and the year. The first turtle was A 11. I would mark them and feed them. Turtles love tomatoes and if you put it near them and wait patiently you can watch them eat.

I went out most mornings for two months and labeled turtles. If I saw one I had already marked I notated the number and location that I found him/her on my calendar. I did notice that some were often in the same area about the same time each morning.

In July my grandchildren arrived. They loved the turtles. They would hop out of bed and want to go feed the turtles before they had their own breakfast. They learned to wait quietly while the turtles ate, which is quite a feat for 5 and 3 year olds!

I was amazed at the number of different turtles that visited my home. By the end of August I was up to P 11. I had also a number of regulars. The grandchildren quickly learned where to look and were so disappointed when a turtle missed a morning feeding.

Fall came and I wondered where they would go for the winter and how far they would travel. In late March the following year we had an unusually warm spell. One morning I was pulling out of the driveway and there was a box turtle. I hit the brakes and jumped out of the car. I looked on the back of the shell and faintly I could see that K 11 had returned. I couldn't wait to call the grandchildren and tell them the tale of the turtle."

Don't you know how lucky those children are to have a grandmother who paints turtles. I wish I had thought of doing that years ago. Each year I have had conversations, albeit one-sided, with a large box turtle, assuming it was a single individual. It has grown larger year by year but it may be several, not just the one. Is it a lone creature ranging over this village lot, or one of a pair? I shall arm myself with a tomato and see if more than one can be coaxed from the underbrush.